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Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the United Nations Volunteers Programme

Note by the Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit for the consideration of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Evaluation on the United Nations Volunteers Programme" (JIU/REP/2003/7).

I. Introduction

1. The objective of the present review of the United Nations Volunteer (UNV) programme is to evaluate UNV administrative and management structure and methods, with a view to recommending improvements that could ensure the most efficient use of resources. The scope of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report is limited to the following areas: mandate; volunteer resources management; partnerships; management structure; human resources management; programme planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting; and oversight.

2. The JIU report benefited from the views expressed by officials of UNV, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and a number of United Nations system organizations. The following comments draw on the views of UNV and UNDP management.

II. General comments

3. Generally, and subject to further comments and observations below, the Secretary-General finds the conclusions balanced and constructive, particularly as expressed in the main body of the report. The Secretary-General is pleased that the Inspector has concluded that UNV, as a programme administered by UNDP, has

* A/59/150.

** The submission of the note was delayed to allow sufficient time for its review and to obtain relevant clearances.

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proven to be dynamic and quick to respond to changing and expanding demands, with a high degree of commitment to continuous improvement and with its profile, distinctive image and core values enhanced. In this connection, the Secretary-General welcomes generally the recommendations and suggestions made in a number of areas.

4. The Secretary-General notes that the Inspector's findings confirm that the positive impact of actions taken by UNV and UNDP in the area of management and administration has been sustained and further built upon. These actions have been guided in particular by the earlier far-reaching workflow review undertaken by UNV itself and the extensive management audit carried out by the UNDP Office of Audit and Performance Review in the late 1990s.

5. The Secretary-General believes that the UNDP/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Executive Board will continue to review, as it has in the past, the areas that the Inspector has mentioned as possibly requiring guidance from the Board.

6. The findings of the JIU, when combined with those pertaining to the more substantive aspects of the UNV programme, confirm the relevance of the programme as it has evolved over recent years, in particular as a result of using the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001 as a strategic opportunity. In this connection, the Secretary-General draws attention to the UNDP Administrator's regular biennial report on UNV that he presented to the June 2004 annual session of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board (DP/2004/24) and to Executive Board decision 2004/16, adopted following its deliberations on the report.

III. Comments on the recommendations

Recommendation 1

UNV management should continue improving the representation of volunteers from underrepresented developing countries, women, youth and national volunteers through:

(a) Seeking guidance from the UNDP Executive Board on what it considers is the appropriate classification/ratio of volunteers from developing and industrialized countries

7. The Secretary-General takes note of this recommendation and wishes to draw attention to the fact that the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board, as part of its oversight responsibilities for UNV, has reviewed and approved on a regular basis reports that include data on the ratio in question. The Secretary-General further wishes to advise that in 2003 the ratio of United Nations volunteers from developing countries reached 72 per cent, up from 67 per cent in 2000 and 69 per cent in 2002.

(b) Requesting donors to increase the number of fully funded volunteers from underrepresented developing countries

8. The Secretary-General agrees with this recommendation and wishes to advise that UNV continues to pursue this issue.

(c) Undertaking a more proactive approach for "rostering" women candidates from specific countries

9. The Secretary-General agrees with this recommendation and wishes to advise that a deliberate effort is under way to increase the number of female candidates recommended for UNV assignments in order to improve the gender balance.

(d) Aligning the UNV gender target to the approved United Nations goal and establishing incremental targets to reach the ultimate goal of a 50-50 gender balance

10. UNV had previously established targets for the gender balance aimed at keeping the ratio between men and women within a 40 per cent to 60 per cent range. However, in the light of the discussions with the Inspector, UNV has now adopted the goal of a 50-50 gender balance. Interim targets will be established in 2005.

(e) Extending the internship programme with the participation of other donors

11. The Secretary-General wishes to advise that funding for third-country nationals is part of the UNV approach to negotiating relevant funding agreements with donor Governments.

(f) Identifying certain types of activities of a less complex nature where the younger generation can play a more active role as volunteers, not only as interns

12. The Secretary-General takes note of this recommendation and wishes to advise that the assignment of UNV volunteers is based on demand. One of the strengths of the UNV programme is the profile of UNV volunteers, who typically are mid-career professionals with an average age of 39 years with five to ten years of professional experience. UNV is, however, aware of the opportunity for younger people to engage as UNV volunteers as well, and it is exploring various ways of pursuing this, as outlined in more detail in the Administrator's report (see paragraph 6 above).

(g) Encouraging the employment of national UNVs by partners, in particular in countries where this modality is still unexplored, so as to achieve an adequate mix of national/international volunteers at the country level

13. The Secretary-General wishes to advise that the proportion of national volunteers engaged by UNV has further increased, having reached 39 per cent in 2003, up from 24 per cent in 2000.

Recommendation 2

In order to address the concerns about and conflicting views on the issue of the cost, concept and functions of UNVs, UNV management should:

(a) Undertake a comprehensive review of the allowances granted to its volunteers, in comparison with other volunteer-sending organizations, and identify any other element specific to UNV that should be reflected in the level of remuneration

14. Steps are currently being taken to undertake such a review.

(b) Seek the guidance of the UNDP Executive Board, for the sake of transparency and fairness and to obtain acceptance of the results of the review prior to introducing any changes as appropriate

15. UNV, as appropriate, and based on the materiality of possible changes, will seek the guidance of the Executive Board on these issues.

(c) Clearly define with UNV partners the functions, responsibilities and authority that can be delegated to UNVs within the scope of the agreements in process with them

16. UNV will continue to pay attention to these issues and to monitor them with partners with whom programmes are being developed and implemented.

(d) With the assistance of UNDP and the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs: (i) clarify the issue of the status, privileges and immunities that could and should be granted to UNVs in the performance of their functions and include the appropriate references in the memorandums of understanding with UNV partners; and (ii) consider the possibility of providing UNVs with a laissez-passer akin to the United Nations officials document, specifying the extent of immunities and privileges granted to them

17. This issue has been considered previously by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs. In the light of this recommendation of the Inspector, the Secretary-General has asked UNV, UNDP and the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs to review the issue again.

Recommendation 3

UNV management should encourage wider use of the online application system and closely monitor its impact on the office workload. Measurement and cost indicators should be introduced for processing applications in order to assess the cost-effectiveness of operations properly. UNV should fine-tune its "rostering" policy to ensure that the availab offer meets existing and changing demands, gender goals and as wide a geog phical representation as possible

18. UNV will continue to explor nd make full use of the potential of the online application system. The rostering cr ria are reviewed and adjusted at minimum on a yearly basis and whenever new velopments lead to changes in demand for volunteers. A new recruitment monit ing tool, which was introduced in late 2003, will also provide very useful data on the demand for volunteers and thus greatly contribute to fine-tuning rostering policies.

19. The performance of the roster, including its cost-effectiveness, is the subject of regular review by UNV management and will continue to be.

Recommendation 4

UNV management should assess the cost-effectiveness of the programme officer and programme manager function in each specific country/mission and evaluate the adequacy of backstopping in countries where no country team exists

20. The adequacy of backstopping provided by the focal points within the UNDP country office in countries where there is no UNV programme officer or manager is continuously being assessed by UNV in consultation with UNDP. Within the limits of budgetary resources available for programme officers, it is a common feature that posts are moved from countries with declining or stable needs to countries where there is an emerging and growing need for backstopping services.

Recommendation 5

UNV should formalize/revitalize its relationship with partners by reviewing the existing administrative and operational arrangements and agreements, establishing new ones, and setting up a network of focal points, as applicable

21. UNV is pursuing a formalized and revitalized relationship with partners. As such, in 2003 a new global memorandum of understanding was signed with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Similar arrangements are currently under way with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization. Internal focal points have also been assigned with a view to further supporting efforts in this respect.

Recommendation 6

Existing management practices and tools at UNV should be strengthened through:

(a) More frequent meetings and fine-tuned agendas of the senior staff meeting and the core management team

22. In addition to regular meetings and consultations among senior staff in different forums, during the period January 2004 to June 2004, four core management team meetings and four senior staff meetings were held. The agenda for all meetings was distributed well in advance. In addition, the annual senior staff retreat was held with the participation of all senior staff meeting members.

(b) Clearly defined division of responsibilities between the Executive Coordinator and the Deputy Executive Coordinator and reporting lines to them, which should be communicated to all the staff

23. The Secretary-General notes the recommendation.

(c) Systematic and orderly recording and distribution of management decisions, as appropriate, in the form of administrative issuances

24. The Secretary-General notes the recommendation.

(d) Consolidation of units and redefinition of the reporting lines

25. The Secretary-General notes the recommendation. UNV management continuously monitors the adequacy of existing organizational structures and takes corrective action as appropriate.

Recommendation 7

UNV management should finalize and implement a human resources management strategy that encompasses policies and targets to address the need for:

(a) Improving geographical representation of staff and gender balance

(b) Streamlining its recruitment practices through adequate use of the various types of appointment

(c) Filling, reclassifying or abolishing vacant posts as appropriate

(d) Consolidating the existing staff development plan

26. The recommendation is noted. UNV is taking action, as appropriate, on the various aspects of this recommendation.

Recommendation 8

The UNV biennial report of the Administrator to the UNDP Executive Board should regularly include a chapter on UNV human resource management and provide comparative statistical data on the number of posts, funding sources and contracting arrangements, the geographical distribution of professional staff and the gender balance

27. With UNV an integral part of UNDP, all issues relating to UNV human resources management are reported to and reviewed by the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board as part of UNDP's overall human resources management.

Recommendation 9

UNV should improve long-term, intermediate and short-term planning through:

(a) Devising a long-term planning strategy that summarizes in a short strategic paper the concepts developed in the UNV mission statement and the seven key planning goals

(b) Focusing each year of the three-year rolling business plan on a more limited number of high-priority activities, and trying to achieve a balance between ongoing activities and new initiatives and projects

(c) Completing the updating of annual plans during the first quarter of the year, indicating the degree of priority for each activity, success indicators and time frames/deadlines for delivery

(d) Implementing results-oriented management to ensure that resources are allocated in line with programme priorities and expected results

28. The Secretary-General notes the recommendation and wishes to advise that the area of business planning and results-oriented management/budgeting approach is being transformed throughout UNDP, including UNV, following the introduction in January 2004 of the second multi-year funding framework, 2004-2007 and the new

enterprise resource-planning system. In this context, action on the different aspects of this recommendation will be taken as appropriate.

Recommendation 10

UNV should improve the presentation of its "Projected resource availability and utilization of resources" in the report of the Administrator by including the information referred to in paragraph 119

29. UNV continues to explore, in consultation with the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board, ways of improving the presentation of its "projected resource availability and utilization of resources" in the Administrator's biennial report to the Executive Board.

Recommendation 11

UNV management should devise a funding strategy to address: (a) the decrease in the biennial support budget; (b) the optimal level of funding and use of the Special Voluntary Fund; (c) the untimely receipt of contributions from donors; and (d) the potential for increase in private sector fund-raising

30. The Secretary-General takes note of this recommendation. UNV aims at integrating these and other related issues into an overall funding and resource-mobilization strategy.

Recommendation 12

As a matter of priority, UNV management should take the following actions to enhance programme monitoring, evaluation and reporting:

(a) The biennial report should be more analytical in presenting the results of programme implementation

31. The response to recommendation 9 above outlines developments that will also facilitate enhanced presentation of future reports to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board. This will further be in line with Board decision 2004/16, adopted at its 2004 annual session.

(b) An annual report should be prepared measuring results against established objectives and goals in the UNV business plan

32. Building on the response provided to recommendation 9 above, the Secretary-General wishes to advise that UNV, as a programme administered by UNDP, will comply with UNDP reporting requirements pertaining to the multi-year funding framework, 2004-2007, including the annual reporting related to the preparation of the UNDP results-oriented annual report.

(c) Effective programme monitoring should be exercised through quarterly reviews of the implementation of the annual business plan in the senior staff meetings

33. In the context outlined in response to recommendations 9 and 12 (a) and (b) above, UNV will adapt its programme monitoring to the new instruments.

(d) UNV should determine whether the enterprise resource-planning system would serve the purpose of monitoring the implementation of evaluations' recommendations and, on that basis, take an informed decision on the need to develop a separate follow-up system

34. The Secretary-General notes this recommendation.

(e) The senior staff meetings should include in their agenda a quarterly report on the status of implementation of the evaluation plan and follow-up on resulting evaluations

35. Based on this recommendation, such reporting is being introduced.

Recommendation 13

UNV should seek to identify the reasons for the low response from users to the new volunteer reporting system and take the necessary measures to enforce compliance. Further, UNV should study how this system could be used to address the concerns regarding the need to better assess the impact of the volunteers' work

36. Steps have been taken to further enhance the volunteer reporting system introduced in 2003. In addition to the developments outlined in response to recommendations 9 and 12 (a) and (b) above, the volunteer reports system is an important tool for impact assessment and results-based management.

Recommendation 14

UNDP Office of Audit and Performance Review should institute a regular oversight review cycle for UNV to ensure appropriate coverage of UNV activities

37. The Secretary-General notes this recommendation. UNV, as a programme administered by UNDP, is subject to internal and external audit and other oversight in accordance with the relevant established regulations, rules, policies and procedures.

Recommendation 15

UNV should seek to define, within the context of the agreements with different partners, the modalities of relevant investigation services into UNV activities

38. The Secretary-General takes note of this recommendation. UNV will explore concrete ways of ensuring that such investigative services are provided within the context of its formalized and revitalized relationship with United Nations partners (see also the response to recommendation 5 above).